

Message Text

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TO AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 000683

E.O. 11652:GDS

TAGS: TBIO, PFOR, CS

SUBJECT: US ARMY MEDICAL RESEARCH IN COSTA RICA

REF: SAN JOSE 4737

1. THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION HAS BEEN PROVIDED BY DOD ON PROPOSED BLACKFLY RESEARCH IN HOPES THAT EMBASSY WILL AGAIN REVIEW PROPOSAL AND AGREE TO SEEK GOCR CLEARANCE. REGRET THAT EARLIER INFO SUPPLIED TO EMBASSY ON PROJECT WAS INCOMPLETE. EARLY RESPONSE REQUESTED DUE TO SHORT LEAD TIME.

2. SUMMARY OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION SUPPLIED BY TEST GROUP TEAM CHIEF:

-- NO ARMY RESEARCH PROGRAM IS PRESENTLY UNDERWAY IN COSTA RICA.

-- THE LOCAL CONTACT, DR. VARGAS, IS AN UNOFFICIAL CONTACT NOT IN THE EMPLOY OF THE USG.

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-- CONTACT WITH DR. VARGAS IS NOT ESSENTIAL FOR THE TEST.

-- DR. VARGAS HAD A DA MEDICAL R&D CONTRACT DURING

1968-1970 COLLECTING INFORMATION ON BLACKFLIES.

-- THE ONLY COMMUNICATION WITH DR. VARGAS HAS BEEN BY COL GERBERG (USAR) WHO WROTE VARGAS THAT HE WOULD BE CONDUCTING TESTS BUT DID NOT MENTION THE ARMY CONNECTION.

-- PROPOSED TEST IS TO BE CONDUCTED BY FOUR US OFFICERS WITH NO COSTA RICAN PARTICIPATION.

-- THE US OFFICERS WILL NOT VISIT THE UNIVERSITY OF COSTA RICA.

-- NEITHER UNIVERSITY OF COSTA RICA NOR CORNELL UNIVERSITY IS INVOLVED IN ANY WAY IN THIS PROJECT. PROFESSORS FROM BOTH SCHOOLS TOOK PART IN THE 1968-1970 TEST.

-- THE GOVERNMENT OF COSTA RICA IS NOT INVOLVED.

-- TESTS WOULD BE CONDUCTED IN THE SAN JOSE AREA.

-- THE TEST COULD BE CONDUCTED IN THE CANAL ZONE, BUT WOULD BE MORE EXPENSIVE AND TIME CONSUMING SINCE BASE LINE DATA IS AVAILABLE FOR COSTA RICA AND NOT FOR PANAMA.

-- ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL EFFORT WHICH WOULD BE REQUIRED TO SHIFT TESTS TO PANAMA IS 4 MONTHS OF ADDITIONAL RESEARCH.

-- THERE ARE NO CIVILIANS ASSIGNED TO THE TESTING GROUP WHO COULD CONDUCT THE TEST.

-- THE PROPOSED TEST IS TO BE THE CULMINATION OF A PROJECT BEGUN IN 1972.

-- ALL PREVIOUS TESTING IN THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN IN THE US USING NONDISEASE-BEARING VECTORS.

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3. ACCEPTABLE TEST CONDITIONS WILL EXIST UNTIL ABOUT MID-FEBRUARY AND THE TEAM CAN ACCEPT UP TO A TWO-WEEK DELAY ON THE REQUESTED DATES OF 11-29 JANUARY.

4. THIS PROJECT HAS NOT BEEN REVIEWED BY AN INTER-DEPARTMENTAL PANEL ON FOREIGN RESEARCH. (DEPT. OF STATE IS UNABLE TO IDENTIFY ANY INTERDEPARTMENTAL PANEL WHICH REVIEWS PROPOSED MEDICAL RESEARCH.)

5. THERE FOLLOW EXCERPTS FROM A DETAILED PROJECT DESCRIPTION:

ALTHOUGH THE DEET JACKET HAS BEEN SHOWN TO BE EFFECTIVE AGAINST SEVERAL MAN-BITTING SPECIES OF SIMULIIDAE IN THE UNITED STATES, IT HAS NOT BEEN TESTED AGAINST BLACKFLY SPECIES INCRIMINATED AS DISEASE VECTORS, SUCH AS OCCURS IN TROPICAL CENTRAL AMERICA. IN ADDITION, THERE IS A WORLDWIDE SHORTAGE OF DEET, WHICH HAS LED TO A DRAMATIC INCREASE IN COST FOR THIS REPELLENT. IT IS THEREFORE NECESSARY TO INVESTIGATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LESS COSTLY ALTERNATIVE REPELLENTS UTILIZING THE JACKET CONCEPT.

IT IS PROPOSED THAT THE FIELD EVALUATION BE CONDUCTED DURING THE PERIOD 11-25 JANUARY 1975. THIS TIME PERIOD IS WITHIN THE DRY SEASON IN COSTA RICA, DURING WHICH PEAK BLACKFLY POPULATIONS HAVE BEEN RECORDED BY VARGAS AND TRAVIS (1973). THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE STUDY WILL BE LIMITED TO FOUR MILITARY PERSONNEL: COL EUGENE GERBERG (USAR), MAJ BERNARD SCHIEFER, CPT ROBERT VAVRA, AND CPT ROBERT FROMMER. CPT MARVIN BERTSCH HAS BEEN DESIGNATED AS AN ALTERNATE. NO LOCAL NATIONALS OR OTHER CIVILIAN PERSONNEL WILL BE UTILIZED IN THE STUDY. SEVERAL SITES IN THE SAN JOSE VICINITY OF COSTA RICA ARE UNDER PRIMARY CONSIDERATION AS SUITABLE STUDY SITES. THE NUMBER OF BLACKFLIES PRESENT WILL BE THE DETERMINING FACTOR AS TO WHICH SITE WILL BE SELECTED TO CONDUCT THE STUDY.

CONSIDERATION FOR SELECTING COSTA RICA.

A. A RECENT STUDY BY VARGAS AND TRAVIS, 1973, DESCRIBES THE BLACKFLY COLLECTION SITES AND HABITATS THROUGHOUT CONFIDENTIAL

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COSTA RICA. SEVERAL REPORTS "DESCRIBE IN DETAIL THE BIONOMICS OF COSTA RICAN BLACKFLIES TO INCLUDE BASELINE DATA CONCERNING SPECIES COMPOSITION, POPULATION INDICES. ETC. INFORMATION OF THIS TYPE IS NOT AVAILABLE FOR PANAMA.

B. TWO SPECIES OF BLACKFLIES, WHICH ARE KNOWN VECTORS OF ONCHOCERCIASIS IN THE AMERICAS, ARE KNOWN TO BE PRESENT IN COSTA RICA. LITERATURE REVIEWS HAVE NOT SHOWN THESE SPECIES IN PANAMA. FROM A MEDICAL STANDPOINT, IT IS IMPORTANT TO CONDUCT THE STUDY IN AN AREA WHERE THE KNOWN VECTORS EXIST.

C. IT IS IMPORTANT TO ASCERTAIN THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE REPELLENT IMPREGNATED JACKETS UNDER TROPICAL CONDITIONS

OF HIGH TEMPERATURE AND HIGH HUMIDITY AS NORMALLY PROVIDED
IN CENTRAL AMERICA.

METHODOLOGY. AFTER SELECTING A SUITABLE SITE, THE FOUR
INVESTIGATORS WILL CONDUCT THE FIELD EVALUATION FOR TEN

CONSECUTIVE DAYS. DURING THE COURSE OF A DAY'S TEST,
EACH INVESTIGATOR WILL WEAR ONE OF THE REPELLENT JACKETS
FOR EACH 30 MINUTE PERIOD OF TIME, RECORDING THE NUMBER
OF FLIES LANDING ON THE UPPER TORSO OF THE BODY.
THIS PROCEDURE WILL BE CONTINUED UNTIL ALL OF THE REPEL-
LENT JACKETS HAVE BEEN WORN. IN ADDITION, NON-TREATED
JACKETS WILL BE WORN BY AT LEAST ONE INVESTIGATOR DURING
EACH 30 MINUTE INTERVAL. THUS, THE EXPERIMENTAL REPELLENTS
WILL BE COMPARED TO EACH OTHER, A CONTROL (UNTREATED
JACKET), AND TO THE STANDARD (DEET TREATED JACKET).
LANDING COUNT DATA WILL THEN BE STATISTICALLY ANALYZED TO
DETERMINE THE RELATIVE EFFECTIVENESS OF EACH REPELLENT.

MISCELLANEOUS INFORMATION. NO LOCAL NATIONALS WILL PARTI-
CIPATE IN THIS STUDY. DR. MARIO VARGAS, UNIVERSITY OF
COSTA RICA WAS IDENTIFIED AS A POINT OF CONTACT FOR
INFORMATION PURPOSES ONLY. HE IS CONSIDERED AN EXPERT ON
BLACKFLIES OF COSTA RICA. IT IS HOPED THAT HE MIGHT BE
ABLE TO PROVIDE THE TEAM CURRENT INFORMATION AS TO THE
BEST SITE AT WHICH TO CONDUCT THE REPELLENT STUDY.
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REFERENCES. VARGAS, M.V., AND B.V. TRAVIS, 1973. BIONOMIA
DE LOS SIMULIDOS (DIPTERA; SIMULIIDAE) EN COSTA RICA IV.
LOCALIZACION Y DESCRIPCION DE LOS LUGARES DE RECOLECCION.
REV. BIOL. TROP. 21(1): 143-175. INGERSOLL

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